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TITLE OF THE INVENTION
**ALL-ANALOG CALIBRATION OF STRING-DAC LINEARITY: APPLICATION
TO HIGH VOLTAGE PROCESSES**

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/484,693 filed July 3, 2003 entitled CALIBRATION OF DAC LINEARITY USING PWL APPROXIMATION.

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STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR
DEVELOPMENT

N/A

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present application relates generally to digital-to-analog converters, and more specifically to an improved piece-wise linear calibration technique for resistor string digital-to-analog converters.

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Digital-to-analog converters (DACs) are known that employ resistor strings to convert digital input code values into analog signals. In a typical mode of operation, a conventional resistor string DAC receives digital input code values at an input of the DAC, and employs a resistor string

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to convert the respective digital input code values into an analog signal at an output of the DAC. Each digital input

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code value represents a quantized value, which is converted into a corresponding analog value based on the transfer function of the DAC.

5 The resistor string of the conventional DAC described above includes a number of resistors connected in series, in which each resistor has a voltage tap at each of its ends. Further, the resistor string is typically biased at each of its opposing ends by two different reference voltages. For example, one reference voltage may be a positive voltage
10 ranging from about 1 to 5 volts, and the other reference voltage may be a negative voltage ranging from about -1 to -5 volts. Accordingly, the resistor string forms a voltage divider network, and each voltage tap of the resistor string is accessible to obtain a desired digital-to-analog
15 conversion.

One drawback of the conventional resistor string DAC is that the offset, gain, and/or integral non-linearity of the DAC are typically imperfect. As a result, the analog output signal produced by the DAC frequently has an error
20 component, which prevents the amplitude of the DAC analog output signal from directly corresponding to the magnitude of the digital input code values at the DAC input.

One way of improving the offset, gain, and integral non-linearity of the conventional resistor string DAC is to
25 apply a laser trimming technique to the resistor string included therein to assure that each resistor in the string has substantially the same resistance value. In this way, the division of the bias voltage across the resistor string can be made more uniform, thereby improving the offset,
30 gain, and integral non-linearity of the DAC. However,

employing such laser trimming techniques can significantly increase the overall cost of the DAC.

5 The offset, gain, and integral non-linearity of the conventional DAC can also be improved by a digital calibration technique. For example, a conventional circuit for digitally calibrating a DAC may include a main DAC to be calibrated, a single calibration DAC, a memory, and at least one digital logic block for performing arithmetic operations. In a typical mode of operation, a plurality of
10 integral non-linearity error values of the main DAC are determined, and the error values are coded into the memory as control points. Next, when a digital input code value is applied to the DAC input, a determination is made as to which two adjacent control points the code value lies
15 between. A piecewise linear (PWL) function is then established between the two control points, and an error value is interpolated from the PWL function corresponding to the applied digital input code value by the arithmetic logic circuitry. The interpolated error values are representative
20 of an interpolated approximation of the main DAC's integral non-linearity curve. Next, the interpolated error value is applied to the input of the calibration DAC to produce a corresponding analog output, which is subsequently subtracted from the output of the main DAC to remove the
25 error component therefrom.

However, implementing the above-described digital DAC calibration technique on a semiconductor die (i.e., an integrated circuit chip) can be problematic, especially in high voltage applications (e.g., ± 10 volt output range) that
30 employ large geometry process technology (e.g.,

approximately 2 μm minimum feature length). This is because in such large geometry processes, the computation of the PWL arithmetic by the digital logic circuitry often results in inefficient use of the die area, thereby increasing costs.

5 It would therefore be desirable to have an improved calibration technique for digital-to-analog converters. Such a DAC calibration technique would be adaptable for calibrating DACs that employ resistor strings. It would also be desirable to have a DAC calibration technique that
10 makes more efficient use of semiconductor die area.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 In accordance with the present invention, a system and method of calibrating a digital-to-analog converter (DAC)
15 such as a resistor string DAC is provided that reduces costs by making more efficient use of semiconductor die area. Benefits of the presently disclosed DAC calibration technique are achieved by employing multiple calibration DACs, which are configured to minimize the amount of digital
20 logic circuitry needed to generate a piecewise linear (PWL) approximation of the integral non-linearity error of a main DAC to be calibrated.

 In one embodiment, a digital-to-analog converter includes a main DAC to be calibrated, a memory, a plurality
25 of calibration DACs, and an analog summing circuit. The main DAC is configured to receive digital input code values at an input of the main DAC, and to convert the respective digital input code values into an analog signal at an output of the main DAC, wherein the analog output signal deviates
30 from a desired analog output signal of the main DAC. A

first one of the plurality of calibration DACs is configured to receive a predetermined number of lower order bits of the respective digital input code values, and to interpolate between a positive reference voltage and a negative reference voltage applied thereto, thereby generating linear waveforms for the PWL approximation. A second calibration DAC is configured to generate the positive reference voltage of the first calibration DAC, and a third calibration DAC is configured to generate the negative reference voltage of the first calibration DAC. The memory is configured to store a plurality of PWL breakpoint code values representing respective digital correction values for the analog output of the main DAC, and to apply consecutive PWL breakpoint code values directly to the second and third calibration DACs, respectively, thereby generating the positive and negative reference voltages for the first calibration DAC. In effect, the second and third calibration DACs are operative to set consecutive PWL breakpoints corresponding to the digital input code value by setting the positive and negative reference voltages of the first calibration DAC.

To maintain the continuity of the generated linear waveforms, the first calibration DAC is configured to produce analog outputs that either ramp up or ramp down between the positive and negative reference voltages applied thereto. In the event a linearly increasing/decreasing digital code word sequence is applied to the first calibration DAC, the first calibration DAC either interpolates from the negative reference voltage to the positive reference voltage, or interpolates from the positive reference voltage to the negative reference

voltage, based at least in part on the relative values of the consecutive PWL breakpoints provided by the second and third calibration DACs. The main DAC and the first calibration DAC then provide their respective analog outputs
5 to the analog summing circuit, which is operative to obtain the difference between the respective analog signals to produce a calibrated analog output.

By employing multiple calibration DACs to minimize the amount of digital logic circuitry needed to generate a
10 piecewise linear approximation of the integral non-linearity error of a main DAC to be calibrated, a DAC calibration circuit can be obtained that makes more efficient use of semiconductor die area and therefore reduces costs. The presently disclosed DAC calibration technique also obviates
15 the need for costly thin film resistor trimming.

Other features, functions, and aspects of the invention will be evident from the Detailed Description of the Invention that follows.

20 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be more fully understood with reference to the following Detailed Description of the Invention in conjunction with the drawings of which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a digital-to-analog
25 converter including a DAC calibration circuit according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram illustrating an integral non-linearity error of the digital-to-analog converter of Fig. 1, and a corresponding piecewise linear approximation of the
30 DAC integral non-linearity error;

Fig. 3 is a schematic diagram of control circuitry for implementing an up/down counting capability within the DAC calibration circuit of Fig. 1; and

Fig. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating a method of operating the DAC calibration circuit of Fig. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/484,693 filed July 3, 2003 entitled CALIBRATION OF DAC LINEARITY USING PWL APPROXIMATION is incorporated herein by reference.

A system and method of calibrating a digital-to-analog converter (DAC) is disclosed that makes more efficient use of semiconductor die area, thereby reducing costs. The presently disclosed DAC calibration technique employs multiple calibration DACs, which are configured to minimize the amount of digital logic circuitry needed to generate a piecewise linear (PWL) approximation of the integral non-linearity error of the DAC to be calibrated.

Fig. 1 depicts an illustrative embodiment of a digital-to-analog converter 100, in accordance with the present invention. In the illustrated embodiment, the DAC 100 comprises a main DAC 102 to be calibrated, and a DAC calibration circuit 104, which includes a memory 106, a pair of DAC registers 107-108, a count up/down DAC control circuit 110, a plurality of calibration DACs 112-114, and an analog summing circuit 116.

Specifically, the main DAC 102 is configured to receive respective digital input code values (Main DAC Input) at an input of the main DAC 102, and to convert the digital input code values into an analog signal at an output of the main

DAC 102. For example, the main DAC 102 may have a resistor string architecture, or any other suitable DAC architecture having good differential non-linearity characteristics and therefore good monotonicity. It is noted, however, that a
5 DAC architecture such as the resistor string architecture typically has less than optimal integral non-linearity characteristics. As a result, the analog output signal produced by the main DAC 102 may have an error component, which may prevent the amplitude of the DAC analog output
10 signal from directly corresponding to the magnitude of the digital input code values at the DAC input.

To remove the integral non-linearity error from the output of the main DAC 102, the DAC calibration circuit 104 is configured to generate an analog output signal
15 proportional to the integral non-linearity error component of the main DAC 102 output, and to subtract the generated analog output from the main DAC 102 output, thereby producing a Calibrated Output with improved integral non-linearity characteristics. In the presently disclosed
20 embodiment, the analog output generated by the DAC calibration circuit 104 is a piecewise linear (PWL) approximation of the integral non-linearity error of the main DAC 102.

Specifically, the PWL approximation of the integral
25 non-linearity error of the main DAC 102 is generated by the calibration DAC 112, which effectively interpolates between a positive reference voltage V_{ref+} and a negative reference voltage V_{ref-} to generate the PWL approximation. In the illustrated embodiment, the calibration DACs 113-114 provide
30 the V_{ref+} and V_{ref-} reference voltages, respectively, to the

calibration DAC 112. The Vref+ and Vref- reference voltages correspond to consecutive pairs of PWL breakpoint code values, a predetermined number of which are stored in the memory 106. In the preferred embodiment, the memory 106 is an on-chip programmable nonvolatile memory circuit. For example, the memory 106 may comprise a fuse link memory, an EEPROM, a FLASH memory, or any other suitable type of memory. The memory 106 provides the consecutive pairs of PWL breakpoint code values to the DAC registers 107-108, which subsequently provide the PWL breakpoint code values directly to the calibration DACs 113-114 to generate the respective Vref+ and Vref- reference voltages. As shown in Fig. 1, a predetermined number of most significant bits (MSBs) of the respective digital input code values of the main DAC 102 (Main DAC MSBs) are provided to the address inputs of the memory 106, and a predetermined number of least significant bits (LSBs) of the respective digital input code values (Main DAC LSBs) are provided to the input of the calibration DAC 112. It is understood that alternative numbers of higher order bits and lower order bits of the Main DAC Input may be provided to the memory 106 and the calibration DAC 112, respectively, to produce a desired PWL approximation.

Fig. 2 depicts illustrative representations of an integral non-linearity error curve 202 of the main DAC 102, and a PWL approximation 204 of the main DAC integral non-linearity error curve, versus the main DAC LSBs. As described above, the main DAC LSBs are applied to the input of the calibration DAC 112, which interpolates between the positive and negative reference voltages Vref+ and Vref-

applied thereto to generate the PWL approximation 204 of the integral non-linearity error of the main DAC 102. As shown in Fig. 2, a predetermined number of PWL breakpoint code values such as PWL breakpoints 206a-206d are determined, based at least in part on the overall shape of the actual integral non-linearity error curve 202. Each one of the PWL breakpoints 206a-206d is specified by a main DAC LSB code value X_n ($n = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$), and a corresponding integral non-linearity error value Y_m ($m = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$). The PWL approximation 204 allows linear interpolation between each adjacent pair of the PWL breakpoints 206a-206d to approximate the integral non-linearity error value Y for each main DAC LSB code value X .

In the preferred embodiment, the PWL breakpoint code values are selected so that they have a predetermined fixed relationship along the X axis. For example, the PWL breakpoint code values may be equally spaced relative to the X axis within the PWL approximation. As a result, it is sufficient to store only the Y axis values of the PWL breakpoints, such as the Y values Y_1 - Y_5 for the PWL breakpoints 206a-206d, in the memory 106 to specify the selected PWL breakpoint code values. Moreover, because the PWL breakpoints have a fixed X axis relationship, the relationship between the PWL breakpoints and the Main DAC LSBs is known, and therefore the need for performing arithmetic operations to determine the relationship between the Main DAC Input and the PWL breakpoints is avoided.

It is noted that although each PWL curve is illustrated in Fig. 2 as a single continuous linear waveform, the waveforms may alternatively comprise any other suitable PWL

curve. For example, each PWL curve may be a saw-tooth waveform or any other suitable waveform. It is further noted that the presently disclosed digital-to-analog converter 100 allows integral non-linearity calibration by an interpolation technique, storing only the predetermined number of PWL breakpoints in the memory 106 (see Fig. 1).

To maintain the continuity of the linear waveforms forming the PWL approximation 204 (see Fig. 2), the calibration DAC 112 is configured to produce analog outputs that either ramp up or ramp down between the positive and negative reference voltages V_{ref+} and V_{ref-} applied thereto. To this end, the Main DAC LSBs at the input of the calibration DAC 112 are made to linearly increase (count up) or linearly decrease (count down) based on the relative values of the consecutive PWL breakpoints provided to the calibration DAC 112 by the calibration DACs 113-114. The state of the DAC control bit 110 controls whether the Main DAC LSBs are made to count up or count down. As a result, the calibration DAC 112 interpolates either (1) from the negative reference voltage V_{ref-} to the positive reference voltage V_{ref+} , or (2) from the positive reference voltage V_{ref+} to the negative reference voltage V_{ref-} .

In the preferred embodiment, the calibration DAC 113 always provides the positive reference voltage V_{ref+} , and the calibration DAC 114 always provides the negative reference voltage V_{ref-} , to the calibration DAC 112. For example, the reference voltages provided by the calibration DACs 113-114 may range from about 10 mV to about 5 V, or from about -10 mV to about -5 V, or any other suitable voltage range. Further, there is no requirement that the

positive reference voltage Vref+ be greater than the negative reference voltage Vref-. As successive segments of the PWL approximation 204 are generated, either the calibration DAC 113 or the calibration DAC 114 receives a new PWL breakpoint code value at its input to change the value of the reference voltage Vref+ or Vref- provided to the calibration DAC 112, and the Main DAC LSBs at the input of the calibration DAC 112 are made to reverse their counting direction.

Fig. 3 depicts an illustrative embodiment of up/down DAC control circuitry 300 included in the calibration DAC 112 (Fig. 1). In the illustrated embodiment, the DAC control circuitry 300 includes a plurality of inverters 310.1-310.8, and a corresponding plurality of switches 302.1-302.8, in which each switch 302.1-302.8 is controlled by the state of the Count up/down DAC control bit 110. For example, in the event the Count up/down control bit 110 is logical 0 (count up), the switches 302.1-302.8 may be actuated so that the Main DAC LSBs bypass the inverters 310.1-310.8; and, in the event the Count up/down control bit 110 is logical 1 (count down), the switches 302.1-302.8 may be actuated so that the Main DAC LSBs are provided to the inverters 310.1-310.8. In this way, the Main DAC LSBs at the input of the calibration DAC 112 may be allowed to linearly increase (count up), or may be made to linearly decrease (count down), before being applied to the remaining circuitry within the calibration DAC 112.

In the preferred embodiment, each one of the calibration DACs 112-114 has an R-2R type binary architecture. For example, the calibration DACs 113-114 may

have 7-8 bits of resolution and accuracy or any other
suitable resolution and accuracy, and therefore the
calibration DACs 113-114 may be implemented as respective
back-DAC R-2R structures. Further, for a PWL approximation
5 having 256 segments, the calibration DAC 112 may be
implemented as an 8-bit DAC, and the main DAC 102 may be
implemented as a 16-bit DAC. Because the calibration DAC
112 is not required to be a high performance DAC, the
calibration DAC 112 may comprise an untrimmed back-DAC R-2R
10 structure, a segmented R-2R structure, or any other suitable
DAC structure. In the event the calibration DAC 112
comprises an R-2R structure, only eight inverters (e.g., the
inverters 310.1-310.8, see Fig. 3) are required to implement
the up/down counting capability at the DAC input. It is
15 noted that if the calibration DAC 112 employs thermometer
coding or other type of coding, then the calibration DAC 112
may require additional digital logic circuitry to implement
the up/down counting capability.

The DAC calibration technique disclosed herein will be
20 better understood with reference to the following
illustrative example. In this example, the main DAC 102 is
a 16-bit monotonic DAC ($N = 16$). Further, the PWL
approximation 204 has 1024 linear segments ($M = 1024$), i.e.,

$$25 \qquad M = 2^K, K = 10. \qquad (1)$$

Further, the calibration DAC 112 is a 6-bit DAC ($N-K =$
6) having positive and negative reference voltage inputs
 V_{ref+} and V_{ref-} . In this example, the positive reference
30 voltage V_{ref+} may be greater than or less than the negative

reference voltage Vref-. In addition, each one of the calibration DACs 113-114 is a 10-bit DAC to assure sufficient resolution for accurately representing the maximum transfer function errors of the main DAC 102.

5 In this example, the transfer function error of the main DAC 102 is determined for every 64th digital input code value of the DAC ($2^{N-K} = 64$). These transfer function errors, which represent the PWL breakpoint code values (e.g., the PWL breakpoints 206a-206d, see Fig. 2) of the PWL
10 approximation 204, are then stored in the memory 106.

Illustrative PWL breakpoint voltages (Vref-, Vref+), corresponding states of the Up/down Control bit, and corresponding code values at the input of the main DAC 102 (Main DAC 102 code values) and at the output of the up/down
15 control circuit within the calibration DAC 112 (Cal DAC 112 code values), are indicated in the TABLE below.

TABLE

Up/down Control bit	Main DAC 102 code values	Cal DAC 112 code values	Vref- (mV)	Vref+ (mV)	Inter- polation
0	000	000	20	30	20mV→30mV
0	001	001	20	30	
0	010	010	20	30	
0	011	011	20	30	
0	100	100	20	30	
0	101	101	20	30	
0	110	110	20	30	
0	111	111	20	30	
1	000	111	50	30	30mV→50mV
1	001	110	50	30	
1	010	101	50	30	
1	011	100	50	30	
1	100	011	50	30	
1	101	010	50	30	

1	110	001	50	30	
1	111	000	50	30	
0	000	000	50	10	50mV→10mV

As indicated in the above TABLE, the PWL breakpoint voltages include

- 5 PWL breakpoint voltage 1 (Vref-) = 20 mV,
 PWL breakpoint voltage 2 (Vref+) = 30 mV,
 PWL breakpoint voltage 3 (Vref-) = 50 mV, and
 PWL breakpoint voltage 4 (Vref+) = 10 mV.

- 10 It is noted that the PWL breakpoint voltages 1-4
 correspond to the Y axis values Y1, Y2, Y3, and Y5 of the
 PWL breakpoints 206a-206d, respectively, as depicted in Fig.
 2. Accordingly, the calibration DAC 112 is operative to
 interpolate from the PWL breakpoint 206a to the PWL
 15 breakpoint 206b (20mV→30mV), from the PWL breakpoint 206b
 to the PWL breakpoint 206c (30mV→50mV), from the PWL
 breakpoint 206c to the PWL breakpoint 206d (50mV→10mV), and
 so on, to generate the PWL approximation 204.

- The digital input code values (Main DAC Input) are
 20 provided to the main DAC 102, the 10 (K = 10) most
 significant bits of the respective digital input code values
 (Main DAC MSBs) are provided to the address inputs of the
 memory 106, and the 6 (N-K = 6) least significant bits of
 the respective digital input code values (Main DAC LSBs) are
 25 provided to the calibration DAC 112. The 10 Main DAC MSBs
 provided to the memory address inputs cause consecutive
 pairs of PWL breakpoint code values to be provided to the
 DAC registers 107-108. As described above, the PWL

breakpoints are preferably selected to have a fixed relationship along the X axis, and therefore the relationship between the PWL breakpoints and the Main DAC LSBs is known and can be properly maintained. The DAC registers 107-108 then provide the consecutive PWL breakpoint code values to the calibration DACs 113-114, respectively, to generate the positive and negative reference voltages V_{ref+} and V_{ref-} of the calibration DAC 112. In the event the calibration DAC 112 is required to interpolate from V_{ref-} to V_{ref+} , the code values at the input of the calibration DAC 112 count up. In the event the calibration DAC 112 is required to interpolate from V_{ref+} to V_{ref-} , the code values at the input of the calibration DAC 112 count down.

For example, the above TABLE indicates that the PWL breakpoints 206a and 206b correspond to 20 mV (V_{ref-}) and 30 mV (V_{ref+}), respectively. Because the calibration DAC 112 is required to interpolate from 20 mV to 30 mV (i.e., from V_{ref-} to V_{ref+}), the calibration DAC 112 is controlled so that the input code values count up. The Count up/down control bit 110 is therefore reset to logical 0 (count up), and the switches 302.1-302.8 (see Fig. 3) are actuated so that the Main DAC LSBs bypass the inverters 310.1-310.8. As a result, a linearly increasing Main DAC LSB code sequence 000→111 is applied to the calibration DAC 112, thereby causing the calibration DAC 112 to count up within the interval 0 to X_1 , and to interpolate from $Y_2=20\text{mV}$ to $Y_3=30\text{mV}$ (see Fig. 2).

Next, the value of the negative reference voltage V_{ref-} is changed from 20 mV to 50 mV, while the positive reference

voltage Vref+ remains unchanged. It is noted that the PWL breakpoints 206b and 206c correspond to 50 mV (Vref-) and 30 mV (Vref+), respectively. Because the calibration DAC 112 is required to interpolate from 30 mV to 50 mV (i.e., from Vref+ to Vref-), the calibration DAC 112 is controlled to count down. The Count up/down control bit 110 is therefore set to logical 1 (count down), and the switches 302.1-302.8 are actuated so that the Main DAC LSBs pass through the inverters 310.1-310.8. As a result, the linearly increasing Main DAC LSB code sequence 000→111 is applied to the calibration DAC 112 and subsequently inverted by the inverters 310.1-310.8, thereby causing the calibration DAC 112 to count down (111→000) within the interval X1 to X2, and to interpolate from Y3=30mV to Y5=50mV (see Fig. 2).

Next, the value of the positive reference voltage Vref+ changes from 30 mV to 10 mV, while the value of the negative reference voltage Vref- remains unchanged. It is noted that the PWL breakpoints 206c and 206d correspond to 50 mV (Vref-) and 10 mV (Vref+), respectively. Because the calibration DAC 112 is required to interpolate from 50 mV to 10 mV (i.e., from Vref- to Vref+), the calibration DAC 112 is controlled to count up. The Count up/down control bit 110 is therefore reset to logical 0 (count up), and the switches 302.1-302.8 are actuated so that the Main DAC LSBs bypass the inverters 310.1-310.8. As a result, the linearly increasing Main DAC LSB code sequence 000→111 is applied to the calibration DAC 112, thereby causing the calibration DAC 112 to count up within the interval X2 to X3, and to interpolate from Y5=50mV to Y1=10mV (see Fig. 2). It is noted that within the next interval X3 to X4, the

calibration DAC 112 is controlled to count down, as indicated in Fig. 2.

The DAC calibration technique continues in the manner described above until the entire PWL approximation 204 is
5 obtained. Finally, the main DAC 102 and the calibration DAC 112 provide their respective analog outputs to the analog summing circuit 116 (see Fig. 1), which is operative to obtain the difference between the respective analog signals to produce the Calibrated Output.

10 A method of operating the presently disclosed DAC calibration circuit is illustrated by reference to Fig. 4. As depicted in step 402, a plurality of PWL breakpoint code values are selected by determining a transfer function error of a main DAC to be calibrated. Next, the plurality of PWL
15 breakpoint code values are stored, as depicted in step 404, in memory. A plurality of digital input code values are then provided, as depicted in step 406, to the main DAC. Further, a predetermined number of MSBs of the digital input code values are provided, as depicted in step 408, to the
20 address inputs of the memory; and, a predetermined number of LSBs of the digital input code values are provided, as also depicted in step 408, to a first calibration DAC. Consecutive pairs of the PWL breakpoint code values are then successively provided, as depicted in step 410, to
25 respective second and third calibration DACs by the memory, thereby generating corresponding positive and negative reference voltages V_{ref+} and V_{ref-} for the first calibration DAC. In the event the first calibration DAC is required to interpolate from V_{ref-} to V_{ref+} , the first calibration DAC
30 is controlled, as depicted in step 412, so that the digital

input code LSBs provided thereto count up. In the event the first calibration DAC is required to interpolate from V_{ref+} to V_{ref-} , the first calibration DAC is controlled, as depicted in step 414, so that the digital input code LSBs provided thereto count down. Finally, the difference between the respective analog outputs of the main DAC and the first calibration DAC is obtained, as depicted in step 416, to produce a calibrated analog output.

Having described the above illustrative embodiments, other alternative embodiments or variations may be made. For example, it should be understood that although the presently disclosed DAC calibration technique is described in the context of a DAC, essentially the same principles may also be applied to analog-to-digital converters (ADCs) that include internal DACs. Further, although the number of PWL breakpoints is a matter of design choice, those of ordinary skill in this art will appreciate that increasing the number of PWL breakpoints will generally increase the accuracy of the PWL approximation of the integral non-linearity error curve of the DAC to be calibrated. It is noted, however, that an increased number of PWL breakpoints will typically increase the memory storage requirements of the DAC.

In addition, as described above, the presently disclosed DAC calibration technique corrects for transfer function errors of the main DAC. Offset, full-scale, and integral linearity errors may therefore be corrected by this DAC calibration technique. In the presently disclosed embodiment, the first and last consecutive pairs of code values provided by the memory may be used to correct the offset error and the full-scale error, respectively.

In addition, in the preferred embodiment, the memory employed in the above-described DAC calibration technique is an internal, non-volatile memory. However, it is understood that a volatile memory may be alternatively employed in the event the user wishes to perform DAC calibration in a system. If a volatile internal memory is used, then the calibration coefficients may be downloaded into the memory using a standard digital interface, before performing regular DAC operation. To achieve a simpler implementation, the internal memory may be omitted and the inputs to the calibration DACs 113-114 may be externally provided to a chip incorporating the DAC 100 (see Fig. 1). Therefore, in this simplified embodiment of the presently disclosed DAC calibration technique, calibration coefficients may be measured and stored elsewhere in the system, and may then be provided externally to the chip from digital input ports/pins, thereby reducing the overall die area.

It will also be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that modifications to and variations of the above-described all-analog calibration of string-DAC linearity may be made without departing from the inventive concepts disclosed herein. Accordingly, the invention should not be viewed as limited except as by the scope and spirit of the appended claims.